

An excerpt from the first book by a
top-level CIA official with operational experience.

U.S. Foreign Intelligence, 1939-1941

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One accidental reason that the war in Europe and its alarming portents for the whole world impinged at all on the consciousness of Americans was that the end of the 1930s was the age of radio. This period saw the beginning of the first dramatic international news "roundups" ever to reach the ears of citizens of the United States direct from Berlin, Vienna, Rome, Paris, and London. The voice of Hitler screaming about Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland at Nuremberg in September 1938 came live across the airwaves while translated passages of the

speech were broadcast and H. V. Kaltenborn analyzed their meaning for Europe's future. Edward R. Murrow and William L. Shirer quickly became household names in the United States, commanding enormous listening audiences. American broadcast news came of age. President Roosevelt and most officials in Washington got most of their up-to-date information about foreign crises from this source or, a day or two later, from the foreign correspondents of the press.

These open source news items, plus the knowledge of foreign countries accumulated by the relatively small number of American university scholars, businessmen, missionaries, and enterprising tourists who traveled abroad constituted a large part of the information possessed by the United States and their officials in Washington. Beyond this, in the

not available to every citizen, was the reporting of the Foreign Service.

Some brilliant minds were in the State Department, as we later discovered when George F. Kennan, Charles E. ("Chip") Bohlen, and Llewellyn E. Thompson educated a generation of officials on the Soviet Union in the postwar era. What was in these minds was a long way from percolating to the consciousness at the top of government in the prewar period, however, and courtly Cordell Hull, Roosevelt's choice as Secretary of State because of his qualifications as a popular politician from a Southern state, was able to contribute very little to the knowledge of foreign affairs needed by Roosevelt.

Washington claimed to be an expert on Europe—as is still true today—so no one relied much on the Foreign Service for in-

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